

Q&A WITH CARRIE BEENE

The renowned high-end beauty retoucher talks about her process and what retouching really is (or should be) BY STEPHANIE BOOZER

Meet Carrie Beene, head retoucher at CarrieNYC. Having graduated with a BFA in painting from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1982, Carrie painted her way across Europe and the Caribbean into the 90s, before moving to New York and reinventing herself as a professional retoucher in 2000. When you think of the intricacies of skin retouching, it makes perfect sense that her painter's eye would be ideal for the job. Knowing how much to soften, eliminate and smooth isn't unlike knowing how much paint to apply. Today, she retouches for high-end clients like MAC and Revlon, as well as magazines like Cosmopolitan, Vogue and Glamour, among a long list of others. In addition to leading workshops in retouching, Carrie published a book, *Real Retouching: A Professional Step-by-Step Guide* (Focal Press, 2011). We caught up with Carrie between her many deadlines to find out how she does what she does so well.

Click: With your painting background, how did you land in retouching?

Carrie: After several years abroad, I returned to the United States and needed to reinvent myself. A photographer friend had begun to dabble with Adobe Illustrator, but that program didn't grab my attention. I still preferred creating art by hand. But then I got a copy of Photoshop. I watched the video tutorial included with the software and, like crack, it was an instant addiction. I loved the idea of manipulating images rather than using a computer to create art from scratch. I made it my job to learn Photoshop, and while scouring the Internet for information, became cognizant of the world of retouching.



Carrie talks about skin in terms of its texture or mottled tone. “Think of it as a zebra that you want to be totally one color,” she says “but you do not want to smooth out the little hairs on its coat.”

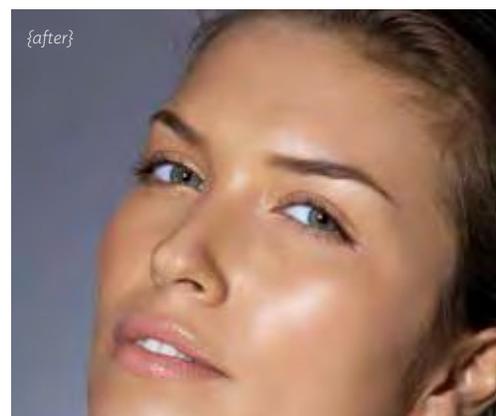
As I became more proficient, I started looking for positions and stumbled upon a color lab hiring retouchers and got the job. I spent two years there honing my craft, but it was more factory-like than what I was hoping for. I wanted high-end magazine images and this was weddings, senior pictures and family photos. I continued to search the Internet for tutorials to sharpen my skills, and flew to Los Angeles to attend a Photoshop World conference, where I learned an amazing amount of information. Finally, after two years at the color lab I responded to an ad for a freelance retoucher at a reputable boutique retouching studio in Chelsea. I was tested and hired, thus beginning my more high-end retouching career.

Click: What type of projects do you work on most of the time?

Carrie: I've done many types of retouching, and back in my freelancing days I even retouched a pizza! Now my clients are mostly hair, beauty and editorial, and we do have product clients as well: cosmetics and fragrance. The retouching can be as simple as doing a “beauty pass,” which is a little skin clean up, removing any small distractions or stray hairs and making a color/contrast adjustment, or as complex as melding together multiple files into a single image with multiple people. One of my favorite clients is Biomega/Aquage with whom we work closely on their every project, as many as 30 or 40 a year.

Click: How do clients communicate their vision to you? What is the language of skin retouching?

Carrie: Communication in retouching is



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complicated; to explain it I'd be practically teaching someone a new language. It takes time working within the industry to learn these communication skills and that's part of the reason for hiring a seasoned pro. We have spent years listening to art directors and photographers describing what they want and can read between the lines because it's not our first outing. It does help me however when a client looks through magazines and pulls pages for me to see when he/she has a certain color vision they are going

for. That way I have a clear visual to move toward whether we want to take it all the way there or just use it for a reference as in skin quality, overall feel, contrast or color.

Click: How do you ensure you don't go too far in an edit? What is “too far” for you?

Carrie: First round I go lightly and wait for the client to ask me to go further, especially on skin, and I will not reshape bodies unless I am asked to do it. I may, however, reshape or straighten



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ill-fitting clothing. I have been pushed to go a little further than I wanted to in the past, but the trend in retouching is to do less and my clients these days don't ask for as much polish as they used to. It's more about the look (color and feel) than polished skin. By the way, we rarely make the girls skinnier.

Click: What is the best way you've found to balance texture and character in skin when minimizing imperfections?

Carrie: Many young retouchers today are looking for shortcuts, but to retain texture and keep a real and non-plastic-looking retouched image, you must use some version of the dodge and burn technique. There are only a handful of D&B techniques; I suggest researching them, picking one and becoming good at it!

Click: In light of the U.K. crack down on heavy retouching to make models look perfect/thinner/etc., what are your thoughts on how retouching is handled in the States?

Carrie: My skin work is minimal. Obviously we are going to remove any actual sores or blemishes (something that won't be there next

week). I leave all the texture for fashion and editorial and just minimize fatigue lines and maybe some bad shadowing around the mouth and chin. These are all things that may not show in a different shot or in different light. But I treat a cosmetic shot differently. Cosmetic shots need to be very high resolution, focused and well-lit so every little detail can be seen... Basically no one in the world looks good this close. These girls are beautiful and they have beautiful skin, but like I said, nobody looks good under a microscope — and that's not the way we ever see people. The other part of retouching that people don't realize is the balancing of the skin. That means making it more tonally equal throughout. It's a photograph, a captured moment in time. The flat palette of the skin is a catch-all for any reflecting colors near or far in the room. Even a girl's brown or black hair can cast a gray shadow on her jaw or neck line. There are just so many variables. So we as retouchers balance that to see a clear clean skin tone, which goes a long way in making a face look fresh and clean. All that said, I obviously am pro-retouching, but people need to understand that we are not, in most cases, changing things inherent to the

person. We work mostly in color and contrast. Photography isn't the same as looking through a person's eyes. Technology translates reality into a printed or on-screen image, and then the particular screen or the medium further translates — no, distorts — the reality. So we as retouchers try to give life to the captured image through enhanced color and contrast or artistic flair. This isn't news reporting, it's advertising and people want it to be appealing.

Click: What's your top advice for photographers trying to perfect their own retouching skills?

Carrie: Send your images to a professional retoucher (wink). In lieu of that, as I said, learn a good dodge and burn technique (there is a free tutorial on my website on my technique). Always remember to keep the background layer untouched and go back to look at it often to remind yourself where you started and not go too far on your image. Also, buy and learn how to use a Wacom tablet and stylus, very important. Plain old experience is the best, but you can also sharpen your eye by looking at high-end magazines.

See more about Carrie online at carrienc.com.